



# **Oklahoma Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program Evaluation Report**

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# OKLAHOMA STRIVING READERS COMPREHENSIVE LITERACY PROGRAM EVALUATION REPORT

The South Central Comprehensive Center (SC3) partnered with the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) to provide expertise during implementation of the Oklahoma Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy (OSRCL) grant, including development and monitoring of added evaluation measures of the program's efficacy. The goal of the OSRCL program is to advance literacy skills, including pre-literacy skills, reading, and writing for students from birth through grade 12. The University of Oklahoma's Educational Training, Evaluation, Assessment, and Measurement (E-TEAM) Department completed nine interviews with OSRCL program coordinators and two focus groups (one with teachers and one with administrators) throughout the state to gather information about program implementation and changes that have occurred as a result of the program. The results of these interviews and focus group discussions are summarized in this report.

## PROGRAM COORDINATOR INTERVIEWS

Program coordinators were asked to describe the aspects of the program implementation that are going well. Responses centered around four areas of implementation: staff, resources, professional development, and reading programs. Respondents explained that they have been able to hire additional staff, such as reading coaches, reading specialists, flash reading teachers, intervention teachers, instructional coaches, and parent liaisons. These staff members provide literacy strategies, model reading strategies, aid in small group instruction, and provide a way to communicate with parents. One coordinator said, "The reason why I am here is because of the Striving Readers grant. I'm a reading specialist, and I'm able to pull kids [from class] and work with them in groups. I'm also doing the assessments and then providing that data to the teachers." The OSRCL program has also allowed schools to procure resources to help their students. Coordinators reported that districts have been able to purchase reading materials for the classrooms and school libraries, as well as extra curriculum and instructional tools. One respondent said that they have been able to implement lending libraries, which parents can visit and borrow materials to help their children. One elementary school has partnered with apartment complexes in the community and housed their lending libraries at those locations. This respondent went on to say, "The apartment manager has reported that it has really helped bring a community into their apartment complex." Several coordinators reported that they are very pleased with the professional learning they have been able to provide and the professional learning communities that have developed. Respondents noted that the program has allowed them to have access to professional learning opportunities and the funding that is necessary to provide such opportunities. Coordinators also reported that being involved with OSRCL has allowed them to implement various school programs to help struggling readers, such as remedial reading classes, after-school programs, parent training programs, MAX (Motivation, Acquisition, and Extension) Teaching and the Read 180 Program.





Program coordinators also discussed aspects of the program implementation that are not going as planned. Many respondents noted that, overall, program implementation was going well. One coordinator said that they have had more success at the lower levels than at the high school level. The high school level has not had as much success due to the difficulty in finding the time to implement high levels of intervention because students cannot be pulled out of class because of course and credit requirements. Another respondent stated that they have made great progress; however, they have not been able to do as much as they would have liked as fast as they would have liked to do it. For example, they would have liked to be able to provide more professional development throughout the school year but found it difficult to get teachers out of the classroom; they would have liked more participation in their parent program but they recognize that it is a new program and it will take time to build the involvement; and although they were able to improve their libraries, they would still like to make them more “robust.”

Other respondents mentioned organizational issues that have been problematic but have nothing to do with the grant. For instance, in one district, coaches sometimes get pushback from veteran teachers who do not welcome someone in their classrooms providing professional instruction and advice. Other issues mentioned included getting buy-in from teachers for implementations, lack of community involvement, lack of communication between administrators, and a delayed start to implementation. Many respondents did not offer information about ways in which they will address barriers and challenges; however, some coordinators are working to overcome these barriers and challenges through meeting frequently and making plans in advance of the school year so once the school year begins, they can get started with program implementation immediately.

Coordinators were asked to provide information about instructional changes that have taken place at the classroom level as a result of the OSRCL program. Respondents shared a wide variety of instructional changes that have been made to the early childhood, middle school, and high school programs, including implementation of cross-curriculum instruction where literacy instruction is embedded into all other classes; a heightened focus on phonics-based instruction; utilization of instructional coaches to observe literacy lessons and provide feedback and professional development; implementation of middle and high school remedial reading classes that address specific literacy deficiencies; differentiating literacy instruction by using small-group instruction and providing more one-on-one time with students; providing literacy education to parents through parenting classes and home visits for parents with young children (five years and younger); and using grant funds to purchase resources to “beef up” literacy instruction and interventions.

Respondents elaborated on some of the literacy resources that have helped improve literacy instruction. Coordinators reported that the majority of the resources were evidence-based, and included literacy assessments, literacy curriculum programs, and reading interventions. Specific resources included the Early Literacy Quick Assessment (ELQA) for pre-kindergarten students; the Wilson Foundation System, which guides systematic phonics instruction to kindergarten students and provides remedial reading instruction practices for middle school and high school students; the Star Early Literacy assessment for early childhood and elementary students; the Read 180 Program for middle and high school students; the Waterford Literacy Program; and the MAX Teaching Program for 6th- through 12th-grade students. One respondent also stated that they have modernized their literacy program with the resources and have purchased Chromebooks to enhance their literacy instruction. One coordinator summed up the instructional changes, saying, “Our instructional strategies and practices have really beefed up a lot in the secondary to incorporate more language and vocabulary, as well as really checking for understanding in those assessment pieces with the before, during, and after activities.”



Coordinators talked about the aspects of the OSRCL program that were making the most difference in students' learning. A common theme from respondents was the use of data from evidence-based assessments to intervene and differentiate literacy instruction. For example, one respondent said that they have started using the Star Early Literacy screener for pre-kindergarten through 12th grade; they found that over 50% of the students were not reading at grade level. This prompted the school to take a deeper look into students' performance in all classes because these reading deficiencies were likely affecting performance in other classes. Coaches have started working with teachers and students in this school to create smart goals and target specific skills that instructional units may be lacking. This coordinator went on to say that they have also used this process with the Read 180 Program, and that the 8th- and 9th-grade students enrolled in that program "have seen tremendous growth." Additionally, these assessments are being used in conjunction with intervention programs, such as Response to Intervention (RTI) and Literacy and Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) for optimal results. Other specific programs and interventions mentioned as making the most difference were MAX Teaching, the implementation of professional learning communities, targeted interventions, increased parent involvement, and creation of learning environments that are more interactive and engaging. As one coordinator stated, "Honestly, it's changing instruction. In my opinion, it's forcing a change in instruction, making class more interactive. It's a bit more engaging instead of old school lecture and worksheet."



Since OSRCL implementation, changes that coordinators have seen in the classroom centered around modified instructional practices, improved student engagement, and the development of new classroom libraries. Changes coordinators noted in students included increased student confidence, improved student engagement, improved language skills for the EL students, and improved assessment scores. One coordinator said that the kindergarten literacy scores have increased by six percent from the baseline data. However, not all coordinators have been able to analyze students' assessment data, but they believe that they will see growth when they do so. Coordinators discussed changes they have seen in teachers, as well. The most commonly mentioned change was an increase in professional development, which

included training on how to implement new curriculum and intervention strategies and professional coaching. One coordinator reported that professional coaching has made a significant difference, saying, "Throughout this year, our instructional [coaches] have really worked on building relationships with teachers and being a resource for teachers to help them with lesson planning or classroom management or things of that nature. The more the year goes on, the more teachers are approaching our instructional coaches and saying, 'Hey, can you help me with this?'" Most of the coordinators said that the teachers have embraced the changes, but some coordinators stated that there are instances where teachers are resistant to the changes.

Program coordinators offered evidence of student learning and progress that they have noticed since the implementation of OSRCL. Much of the evidence that coordinators shared came from improved assessment scores from progress monitoring tools and benchmarking measures. Specifically, coordinators mentioned the following assessments on which students have shown growth: Star Early Literacy, Reading Plus, Lexia, and kindergarten readiness assessments. One coordinator gave an example of evidence of growth, saying, "We use the Star assessment and DIBELS, and then we go over the data. We have a huge spreadsheet with the kids and all of their testing and summarizations and their benchmark test, and we look at those and can see kids that have struggled in the past are making gains this year." Some coordinators said that they will not have any hard evidence until the end-of-year data is available for analysis. Still others are waiting for the ACT and Oklahoma School Testing Program (OSTP) scores that will be available in the spring.

Coordinators said that, overall, the interventions they have used have been successful, but there were a few instances where coordinators felt like they had to do some problem-solving and gather additional intervention resources. For example, one coordinator said that the intervention they were using, Wilson Reading, was geared toward a certain set of students and did not accommodate English learners because there is not sufficient vocabulary support in that program. In this instance, where they have over 80% English language learners, it was important for the district to find an intervention that would serve their entire population.

## TEACHER FOCUS GROUP

Five teachers and one administrator involved with the OSRCL program across the state participated in a focus group to provide feedback about the program. Teachers were asked to describe the most valuable support that OSDE provided during the program. Teachers did not have direct contact with OSDE throughout the project; however, the administrator did and reported that the emails OSDE sent with resources about writing a literacy plan, professional development opportunities, technical assistance, etc. were very helpful. Additionally, the professional development that OSDE provided was reportedly valuable, particularly the MAX training. Teachers mentioned working with instructional coaches, literacy coaches, curriculum directors, ELL directors, and librarians throughout the program. These support professionals helped teachers determine classroom placement, obtain classroom materials, choose books, and organize reading interventions with students.

When asked how they will continue the program at the school and classroom levels, teachers stated that the resources they obtained and knowledge gained from the professional development through the program will continue to be useful when working with students. Additional support professionals are now available every day, rather than just when requested, allowing teachers the assistance they need to help students. In addition to working with students, schools and teachers are also working with the community, getting families involved through activities such as family reading nights, and focusing on academic vocabulary in all schools in their districts.

Teachers did not attend the professional development opportunities offered by OSDE during the summer, either because they were not aware of them or due to scheduling conflicts. However, the administrator did attend the professional development opportunities and reported that networking and getting ideas from others was useful. In addition, she stated that OSDE staff members were helpful.

Focus group participants were asked about their biggest accomplishment with the OSRCL program. One participant said that they met their building-wide goal to improve state test scores by 4%, while another participant said that family involvement has increased. Several teachers mentioned that their schools have acquired more books, they have seen improvements in test scores, and students' excitement and passion for reading has improved. One teacher reported that their intervention programs were so successful that other buildings in the district were also trying to implement them. Another teacher said that the program has allowed staff to work together "as a team" and "get on the same page." She also stated that "everyone is a literacy teacher now."

Participants also discussed some of the challenges they faced with implementing the OSRCL program. The biggest barrier mentioned was time and coordinating people's schedules to participate in professional development. One teacher said that teachers, particularly those in other fields, may need professional development to help them incorporate the reading interventions in their classrooms. Another challenge was the lack of family involvement. Teachers noted that when the students go home, they may not have a support system, and their families may not understand their needs.

## PRINCIPAL FOCUS GROUP

Four principals participated in a focus group to discuss the OSRCL program implementation in their schools or districts. When asked about the most valuable support that OSDE provided, principals reported that the newsletter, technical assistance, and professional development were the most helpful. One principal went on to say that the professional development made a “huge” impact in the building. Teachers came back from training and shared what they learned, which “sparked a lot of good conversation.” Principals also noted that professional development is often difficult to offer, so the professional development offered through the OSRCL program was “really great.” Further, principals stated that OSDE was supportive and was always available to answer questions.

Principals planned to use other money they have to sustain the program and are looking at other funding sources, as well. One principal said she was unsure how they will sustain the program, but said they will do everything they can to keep the program going.

One principal attended a professional development opportunity in the summer and stated that it was beneficial and provided a “wealth of information to incorporate in the classroom.” Principals also liked that the strategies and concepts presented in the professional development opportunities are tied together, allowing participants to “connect the dots.” Other principals reported that they were unable to attend because the opportunities coincided with summer school and conflicted with other summer professional development opportunities.

When asked about their biggest accomplishment with the program, one principal said that they were able to create classroom libraries for every classroom in every subject and acquire more books for their school library. Additionally, they were able to hire a reading teacher who works with all grade levels, providing one-on-one and small-group instruction, which the students enjoy. Another principal said that her district has implemented the same interventions from pre-kindergarten through 8th grade. This district has also trained an additional classroom teacher and hired an interventionist, which has allowed students support that they would not have otherwise received. Principals said that they have noticed that students are more involved and have developed a love of reading. One principal noted that teachers are implementing what they have learned through the program, and even veteran teachers have learned things that have helped.

Principals mentioned a lack of time and a substitute shortage as a barrier to participation in professional development. One principal said that having on-site training during their professional development days would be helpful so that the entire staff could receive the training.

## CONCLUSION

Program coordinators reported many successes in the implementation of the OSRCL program. They have been able to implement interventions and literacy programs, provide professional development, hire staff, and acquire resources for their districts. Additionally, coordinators have been pleased with the instructional changes that have occurred, in addition to the use of assessment data to intervene and differentiate literacy instruction. Further, coordinators have seen positive changes in the students and teachers, including improvements in students’ assessment scores.

Few challenges and issues with implementation were reported. Some coordinators felt that there are some veteran teachers who have been resistant to the changes and coaching. Other issues were related to organizational problems that were unrelated to the OSRCL program implementation. Further, some coordinators were disappointed in the amount of progress they were able to make this school year but were hopeful for more successes in the upcoming school year.

Overall, most coordinators said that the implementation of the OSRCL program has been going well, and that schools and districts are satisfied with the improvements they have seen in their schools, classrooms, teachers, and students as a result of the program.

Teachers and principals also provided feedback concerning their involvement with the OSRCL program. They reported that the professional development opportunities were very beneficial and the resources provided through the program (support staff, resources, books) were invaluable. Many respondents stated that they have seen positive changes in students, teachers, the community, and in the school district as a result of the program. All those we spoke to plan to do what they can to sustain the program in upcoming years. The biggest barrier to program implementation was in finding the time to implement strategies and attend professional development.

It is evident from the interviews and focus groups that program coordinators, teachers, and administrators involved with the OSRCL program have seen positive outcomes due to their participation in the program. Test scores have improved, students are enthusiastic about reading, teachers have learned new strategies they have implemented in the classroom, parents are more involved, and the school districts have implemented the program in other classrooms and schools. The few barriers to implementation include some organizational issues and difficulties with time management. Developing some strategies to address these issues in upcoming years would likely improve the program and allow additional staff to participate.

